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THE GREAT RUSH AMID SHARP SPIKE

Migrant workers stand in close proximity outside the Hatia railway station in Ranchi to board trains to go back home. Workers have been making a beeline for transport facilities amid a sharp rise in number of cases and fears of another complete lockdown leaving them stranded | PTI

The deserted AIIMS during the weekend lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday; and a patient on oxygen and drips on a stretcher, apparently due to the lack of Covid beds, receiving primary care outside the Kanpur LLR Hospital | PTI

State records highest 19,067 additions in Covid-19 cases in a single day, apart from 81 deaths; but mortality rate remains low at 1.14%

K'taka sees 1,407% jump in active cases since 2nd wave

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN a massive 1,407 per cent increase in the number of active cases from the commencement of the second wave until now, Karnataka has 1,33,543 patients in various hospitals across the state – the highest number of active cases in the state ever since the pandemic struck the state on March 8, 2020.

The spiralling figure was reached even as Karnataka had the highest daily addition to the Covid tally with a massive 19,067 cases — by far the highest single-day addition — with the highest number of deaths in a single day at 81, taking the toll to 13,351.

There were just 8,860 active cases on March 15 when the indicators to the beginning of the second wave were showing up, which shows how rapidly the dreaded infection is spreading.

Karnataka is now third among states with the highest number of patients under treatment, or active cases. Maharashtra with 6,47,933, and Uttar Pradesh with 1,91,457 are first and second.

Karnataka recorded 1,20,929 active cases on October 10, 2020, which had remained the highest until Sunday. From September 10, 2020 until now, the state has seen 32 days when the number of active cases has been over one lakh. In the second wave, the state crossed it on April 16, while it had gone — and remained — below that since October 21, 2020 when the first wave had begun waning.

Similarly, active cases in Bengaluru crossed the 97,000-mark touching 97,897.

The state now has a Covid tally of 11,61,065 cases with the single-day addition of 19,067 cases on Sunday, taking the figure up from the Saturday tally of 11,41,998. With this, the state's positivity rate has gone further up to 4.92 per cent from 4.87 per cent the previous day. The positivity rate had witnessed a robust decline in the number of persons testing positive per 100 tests, from the peak of 12.54 per cent on September 27, 2020, until April 5 this year when it went up for the first time. From then on it has relentlessly been on the rise from 4.64 per cent on that day to 4.92 per cent now. The state's day-wise positivity rate shot up to 13.09 per cent.

Only the mortality rate is showing a heartening decline. It stands at 1.14 per cent, down from 1.28 per cent on March 15. The state health department has been eyeing to bring it down below 1 per cent, which has been achieved in Bengaluru, where the mortality rate now stands at 0.93 per cent. The city reported 60 deaths, though the day's figures are the highest reported in 2021.

Of the 19,067 cases added on Sunday, a massive 12,793 are contributed by Bengaluru Urban. This is a jump from the 11,404 cases reportedly added in the city a day before.

The state's recovery rate fell below 88 per cent, with 4,603 discharges on April 18, taking it to 87.34 per cent. Bengaluru's recovery rate also reduced from 82.61 per cent on Saturday to 81.15 per cent on Sunday. The drop in the recovery rate is after seeing a high of 98.06 per cent on January 30 when the first wave had considerably waned. P3,4

A healthcare worker prepares to collect a swab sample from a passenger at the Kempegowda Bus Station in Bengaluru on Sunday | SHRIRAM BN

STATEWIDE	APRIL 17	APRIL 18
Fresh cases	17,489	19,067
Active cases	1,19,160	1,33,543
Deaths	80	81
Recoveries	5,565	4,603
Fresh cases in B'luru Urban	11,404	12,793

STATE READIES TO TAKE ON THE CURVE

Ballari and Vijayanagara working overtime to meet the demand for oxygen from across the country

Sari cases are increasing in Dharwad district, with a lot of patients seeking ICU admission

As cases rise, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Kamal Pant issues guidelines to be followed

OXYGEN BAN ON INDUSTRY TO SAVE LIVES

SOS as Delhi has less than 100 ICU beds; positivity rate doubles to 16.69% in 12 days

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

AMID dire scarcity of medical oxygen for Covid patients, the Centre on Sunday banned the supply of oxygen for industrial purposes — except in nine specified industries. The decision was taken based on the recommendations of the Empowered Group-II, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said, adding it will come into effect from Thursday.

Parallelly, the Railways decided to roll out an Oxygen Express to ease transport bottlenecks (see graphic).

Delhi is staring at an unprecedented health crisis as it has less than 100 ICU beds vacant in its hospitals, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal revealed. On a day when over 25,000 people tested positive for Covid, Kejriwal said: "I spoke to Home Minister Amit Shah today and informed him of our dire need of beds and oxygen. We are constantly in touch with the Centre and getting help from it." Also, the case positivity rate jumped from 24% to 30% in just 24 hours, he informed.

He wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to increase the number of beds reserved for Covid patients in Central government hospitals from 1,800 to 7,000. Delhi also sought uninterrupted supply of oxygen, which has reached a critical stage.

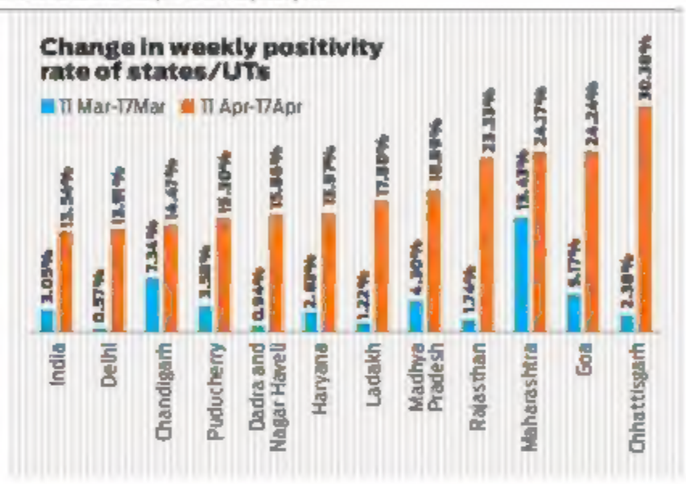
Another grim data point was the national case positivity rate, which doubled to to 16.69% in 12 days. "The daily positivity rate in the last 12 days has doubled from 8% to 16.69%," the Union health ministry said in a statement. And the national weekly positivity rate increased from 3.05% to 13.54% in the last one month (see chart).

In Gujarat, Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel was candid in admitting that the present requirement of Covid beds and other healthcare facilities is more than the state administration's capacity.

In Madhya Pradesh, six critical Covid patients died at the Government Medical College Hospital ICU at Shahdol allegedly due to low oxygen pressure. The hospital though attributed it to co-morbidities.

Social media sites were flooded with requests for help in arranging beds and oxygen.

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 17	APRIL 18
Fresh cases	2,40,423	2,61,500
Recoveries	1,25,751	1,38,423
Deaths	1,303	1,501



Expand jab drive, empower states, ex-PM tells Modi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday wrote to incumbent Narendra Modi offering five suggestions to tackle the second wave of the pandemic. Highlighting the need for an intensified vaccination drive, Singh urged the Centre to look at percentages, not absolute numbers, to assess its impact.

While over 12 crore people in India have been vaccinated as on April 18, in percentage terms it is below 9%, a far cry from 24% in the US, 56% in Israel or 28% in Chile. In the letter, Singh urged the Centre to data on doses ordered for the next six months and their scheme of distribution to help states appropriately plan. Singh appealed for greater leeway for states in defining frontline workers, who can be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years of age.

He also advised the Centre to augment private facilities to improve production while allowing the import of shots cleared by credible international agencies without insisting on bridging trials.

Heed them

- Publicise the number of doses ordered for the next six months. Place advance orders to meet the target
- Make distribution formula transparent so that states can plan their drive. Centre may retain 10% for distribution
- Let states define categories of frontliners who can be vaccinated
- Strengthen and expand the private manufacturing facilities
- Allow import of shots cleared by credible international agencies like USFDA

OXYGEN Express to plug demand-supply gaps

Empty tankers to roll out from Mumbai today to bring liquid medical oxygen from Vizag, Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Bokaro

Full-fledged service of Oxygen Express likely in a few days after green corridors are created

The decision follows proposals made by Maharashtra and MP governments requesting the Railways to help bridge the demand-supply gap

Tankers would be placed on flat wagons (roll-on-roll-off) as part of the plan

The dimensions of the tankers were determined after a meeting between Railway Board, transport commissioners and industry representatives

Ramps have been created at destination stations for smooth roll out

Insurance cover ends for healthcare workers

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE Centre has quietly decided not to extend an insurance scheme of ₹50 lakh for healthcare workers who die in the line of Covid-19 duty beyond a year, it has emerged even as the country is in the middle of a ferocious wave of the infection.

A circular sent by Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan to states last month said that the scheme had concluded on March 24. The Centre had last year announced the scheme to incentivise healthcare workers as part of its ₹1.7 lakh crore Covid-19 relief package.

"Approximately 22 lakh health workers would be provided insurance cover to fight this pandemic," the official statement had said. "Safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health workers would be covered." It also covered workers in the private sector.

While there is no official data on the number of frontline workers who died of Covid-19 in India, according to the Indian Medical Association, at least 739 MBBS doctors, including three doctors in the second and ongoing wave of the pandemic, have succumbed to it.

The scheme was first implemented for 90 days and later extended for a year. Bhushan did not respond to queries by this newspaper on the content of his letter.

'Sad and insensitive'

Doctors expressed dismay. "It's really sad and insensitive on the part of the government," said former IMA president Ravi Wankhedkar

Rahul bites the bullet, cancels election rallies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

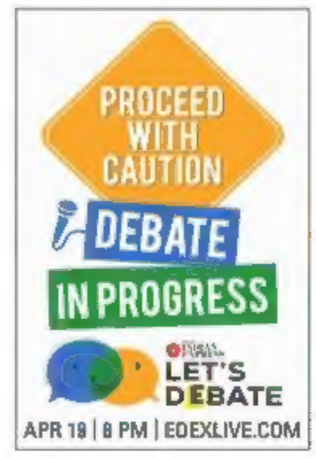
ANNOUNCING the suspension of all his public rallies in West Bengal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged other leaders to consider the consequences of holding huge public rallies.

"In view of the Covid-19 situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances," he said on Twitter. In another tweet in Hindi, Rahul wrote: "One has seen such a crowd of the sick and the dead for the first time."

While the Congress has little stake in the West Bengal elections, it's the biggies like the Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee and the BJP that are locked in a no-holds-barred fight for power.

Though both parties are yet to react, Trinamool candidate from Bhawanipur Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay said he has decided not to hold any major rallies in view of the Covid-19 situation. Bhawanipur goes to polls on April 26. It is the seat held by Mamata in the outgoing Assembly. Both Mamata and BJP leader Amit Shah held roadshows in different parts of Bengal on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Congress spokesperson Jaiveer Shergill lauded Rahul Gandhi and said the BJP must follow him. Shergill said Rahul Gandhi was "leading by example" by cancelling his rallies in the interest of public health and safety.



EXPRESS READ

Guv meets officials over Covid spike

With Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa still recovering from Covid in hospital, Governor Vajubhai Vala on Sunday called for an emergency meeting of officials to take stock of the state's pandemic situation. P4

All-party meet to discuss restrictions

Revenue Minister and Deputy Chair for State Disaster Management Authority R Ashoka will hold an all-party meeting at 3 pm on Monday, as the government is set to announce more curbs, in light of Covid-19. P4

Craftsmen in Karnataka may get vertical homes

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

EACH time you buy a toy, your childhood memory is most likely to go to wooden toys made in Channapatna. Every time you think of sandalwood products or artefacts, it is the state handicraft emporiums you turn to. But how and where do skilful artisans who make these perfectly crafted items live?

The Karnataka State Handicrafts Development Corporation (KSHDC) has come up with an idea to construct vertical homes for these artisans, as big land parcels are difficult to find and land prices have soared across the state. The department has taken the magnifying glass to go through the fineprint of various housing schemes introduced by the State and Central Governments to find the best-suited one. The department is thinking of constructing apartment complexes at its existing land parcels in districts where the concentration of artisans is high. CONTINUED ON: P5

Turned away by 3 B'luru hospitals, 40-yr-old dies

RANJANI MADHAVAN
@ Bengaluru

WHILE politicians have smooth access to hospitals after they test Covid-positive or have any other health issues, a 40-year-old domestic help, Mumtaz, a Covid suspect, died battling for her life, as she could not find a bed in Bengaluru.

A single mother, she leaves behind two children orphaned as three hospitals did not admit her. She died on way to the fourth hospital. Volunteers from the Emergency Response Team (ERT) of NGO Mercy Mission tried desperately to help her get immediate treatment from 7 pm on Saturday, but could not and she died at 10.30 am on Sunday.

Her oxygen saturation levels dropped to 65-70 per cent, while the normal is 95 per cent and higher. Her Covid test result was still awaited when she breathed her last. She visited Shifa Hospital, where no bed was available. She then went to Bowring Hospital, where they said they cannot admit her without the Covid test result. "We received a call after she was rejected at Bowring and we sent them two oxygen cylinders. When the second one was being administered, she stopped responding. We then took her to St Martha's hospital, where they did not give her emergency first-aid unless Rs 40,000 was paid upfront," said Mohammed Zaki Khaleeli, a volunteer with ERT.

Mumtaz, who did not have a job for a while, did not have any money. The volunteers requested with the hospital to provide her treatment, while they would arrange for the money. But the hospital administration refused to oblige, Khaleeli said. They were taking her to Victoria Hospital but she died en route.

After she passed away, even three people could not lift her body as it had swollen because of fluid retention. "Not providing first-aid emergency treatment is inhuman. We had to use our connections to try different hospitals and there was no government help. In the first wave, the war room did a decent job of allocating beds to patients, but this time, they do not seem to be functioning," he added. CONTINUED ON: P4

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